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ABSTRACT

Quality sequence for each student in reading instruction is vital. If "learnings" to be acquired are not sequential, then a student might well face difficulties in learning to read well. Some of the problems in reading instruction may be inherent in the basal textbook being used, and sometimes, problems of reading instruction reside within the teacher. Other problems in reading may be the result of students being inattentive or having a home setting with socioeconomic problems or parents who do not offer encouragement. This paper states that, in identifying the above-named problems, there has been a lack of sequence or order of events to guide students to achieve as optimally as possible in reading. The paper discusses programmed reading and sequence; personalized reading and sequence; and basal readers and sequence, noting that each approach has its strong/weak points. (Contains 10 references.) (NKA)

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Sequencing Student Reading Achievement.

by Marlow Ediger

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SEQUENCING STUDENT READING ACHIEVEMENT

Quality sequence for each student in reading instruction is vital. If learnings to be acquired are not sequential, then a student might well face difficulties in learning to read well. Some of the problems in reading instruction may be inherent in the basal textbook being used. Thus, the following may be in evidence:

1. too many new words appear on a page for students to master.
2. the vocabulary terms introduced on a page are too complex for student understanding.
3. the author's writing style is not easy to follow.
4. too much imagery is used which makes it difficult to comprehend what has been written.
5. excessively long sentence length makes comprehension increasingly complex (Ediger, 1999, 17-21).

Sometimes, problems of reading instruction reside within the teacher, using the materials of instruction such as

1. the teacher adjusting the number of new words and vocabulary terms to the individual learner's present level of achievement
2. the teacher having students attach meaning to the author's style of writing, the lengthy sentences, and to the imagery used in the reading selection
3. the teacher using materials of instruction as well as methods of teaching which capture learner attention in the ongoing reading lesson.
4. the teacher guiding students to perceive purpose or reasons for ongoing reading activities.
5. the teacher providing for individual differences among students such as in abilities, achievement, and talents.
6. the teacher assisting students to make use of what has been learned.
7. the teacher helping students to link what has been learned in class with what transpires in society.
8. the teacher inspiring students to think critically such as in separating facts from opinions, relevant from irrelevant ideas, as well as the salient from the less salient.
9. the teacher working with learners to engage in creative thinking such as in brain storming.
10. the teacher motivating students to use information gleaned from reading to solve personal and social problems (Ediger, 1990, 20-24).

Problems in reading may also be the result of students

1. being inattentive and unwilling to put forth effort in learning to read.
2. having parents/guardians who are not responsible to

encourage/help the student to do well in school.

3. lacking proper clothing, nutrition, rest, and exercise due to poverty as well as a lack of parental/community concern.

4. coming from homes which do not have students participating in sound educational experiences. Quality educational experiences in the home setting include the parent reading aloud appropriate library books to the offspring in a stimulating manner.

5. facing problems of dissension and discord in the home setting.

There are a plethora of problems then which need to be identified and assistance given in order that a student may achieve as optimally as possible in reading. In identifying the above named problems, there has been a lack of sequence or order of events to guide students to achieve as optimally as possible in reading (Ediger, 1977, 49-50).

Programmed Reading and Sequence

Programmed reading is written by one or more programmers. It contains a very rigid set of learnings as sequenced by the programmer. There is no room for input from students or teachers in a program, either in textbook or computer packaged form. The author became very familiar with programmed reading in textbook form when supervising student teachers in Ottumwa, Iowa during the 1970s and early part of the 1980s. Each program in the book had everything in it for the reader to read a small amount of content, respond to a multiple choice test item, and then check if one's answer was correct. A very small amount of content is read so that the answer provided by the student may be checked and feedback given before pursuing the next sequential read, respond, and check format in programmed reading. Everything is inside the textbook, or the computerized version of programmed learning, that is needed for the student to keep on working and learning. Programmed learning represents a self sufficient plan of reading instruction which involves no learner inquiries and no teacher to teach students, except to supervise the on task process.

Programmed reading may stress phonics, syllabication, structural analysis, and comprehension of content at different levels of complexity such as reading for factual content to synthesizing ideas read. With a small amount of information read for each item before responding to a related question and checking one's response, students make few errors in reading. A 90% to 95% correct rate of response can be experienced by students when participating in well written and pilot tested program. The programmed items are very carefully sequenced so that success can be rather continuous and ongoing for the involved student. Problems involved in the use of programmed reading included the following:

1. they are very formal as a procedure to use in reading instruction.

In other words, the programmer "does it all" in selecting objectives, learning opportunities, and assessment techniques. There is no available space for student questions as well as no teacher deliberation within a carefully sequenced program.

2. they do provide for a carefully controlled sequence indicated by the high student success rate of responding to programmed items, but it is at the expense of learner involvement in creativity and critical thinking as well as problem solving skills.

3. they need to be monitored carefully while being used in that the student may look at the correct answer without first going through the steps of reading and responding. Or, the learner may be off task (Ediger, 1983, 52-58).

Personalized Reading and Sequence

Personalized reading emphasizes the student individually sequencing his/her own very own learnings. An ample number of library books needs to be in the offing for a student to select from in terms of what he/she desires to read. These books need to be on a variety of genre' and on different levels of reading complexity. Individual differences in content and reading skill preferences may then be provided for when any student makes a choice of which book to read silently. The student may receive needed help in word identification while reading.

After the reading of the library book has been completed, the student has a conference with the teacher. Here, the learner and the teacher cooperatively discuss the contents of the book. Comprehension from reading may involve evaluating different levels of cognition such as the student being able to apply learnings acquired, analyzing subject matter, synthesizing content, and assessing the worth of what has been read. The complexity level of the questions will depend upon the present achievement level of the student. The student should also read aloud a short selection so that the teacher may notice proficiency in using word attack skills. The reading teacher needs to write relevant comments about the total conference and date it. Comparisons may be made with future conducted conferences. The next sequential library book is then chosen by the student to read silently

Personalized reading differs from programmed reading in that the former

1. is sequenced by the student, not the programmer.

2. is controlled by the learner in that he/she selects and reads sequential library books, whereas the entire program(s) in programmed reading, en toto, are worked out for the student to complete.

3. is very open ended in terms of choices to be made by students whereas programmed learning is a closed system since all decisions for use, basically, were made by the programmer (See Gardner, 1993).

Basal Readers and Sequence in Student Reading

Basal readers represent an in between point of viewing diverse plans of reading instruction. Somewhere between programmed reading and personalized reading, the basal reader has its psychology of instruction to offer. Thus, there are both author controls in basal reader use as well as teacher/student input into the reading curriculum. The authors of the basal readers select sequential stories as content, develop the manual which offers suggestions to the teacher on teaching reading to students, and assist in determining how learners are to be evaluated to ascertain achievement.

The reading teacher, however, may select from the manual which word recognition techniques to emphasize in teaching a specific set of learners and in what sequence. The word recognition techniques to stress in providing for individual differences, among others, my include

1. phonics with its sound/symbol relationships.
2. syllabication with its stress placed upon segments or sound units within a word, not necessarily meaningful units.
3. structural analysis with its emphasis upon meaningful units or segments such as prefixes and suffixes.
4. contextual clues in which the learner substitutes a meaningful word for the unknown word in an ongoing literary selection.
5. picture clues in which the learner looks at the illustration on the page with print discourse to identify the unknown word.
6. configuration clues whereby the reader looks at the shape/form of the unknown word for identification purposes (Ediger and Rao, 1996, Chapter Seven).

Selection of which word recognition techniques to teach students will depend upon learner needs based on teacher diagnosis. The teacher may then sequence these learnings for students. Some of the unknown words will involve new vocabulary terms which provide background information so that what is read makes sense to the student. Students need to understand contextual learnings of the new vocabulary terms, sequentially presented.

The teacher also needs to select how reading comprehension skills are to be taught and in which order. The following comprehension skills need to be taught, among others:

1. cause and effect in that happenings need to be read to ascertain what caused specific events to come about.
2. inferential whereby the student reads between the lines or reads data, for example, from a graph and comes up with attached conclusions. These learnings are not provided in factual form but rather must be gleaned from observing numerical data to notice trends covering a year or

several years.

3. comparisons made such as in comparing the setting, characterizations, plot, irony,and/or sequence of one story as compared to the other.

4. contrasting in which differences are noticed between two or more short stories such as style of writing.

5. reading directions carefully so that correct processes and products are an end result.

6. analyze information to notice salient features in advertisements, bandwagon approaches, right wing ideas, and "join the club procedures."

7. synthesize ideas to obtain main ideas, summaries, and conclusions.

8. identify problems, gather information to solve identified problems, develop an hypothesis, as well as to test the hypothesis.

9. secure background information in order to comprehend adequately the new, ensuing ideas to be read.

10. organize information read to obtain a meaningful sequence of related content (Ediger and Rao, 2000, Chapter Eight).

In basal reader use, the teacher may use methodology from the manual as he/she perceives it ito be useful in teaching a given set of learners. The basal is a neutral device, neither good nor bad in essence, but it depends upon the teacher's wise planning and implementation as to how well these ideas work from the manual in teaching and learning situations. The reading teacher needs to be creative in selecting objectives, learning opportunities to achieve the stated objectives, sequencing these learning activities, and determining evaluation procedures. Each student needs to achieve as optimally as possible. For a detailed discussion on textbook use in the public schools, see Ediger (1996, 89-94). It is very open ended as to how textbooks are to be used in the reading curriculum. The teacher may use many of his/her own ideas in sequencing reading instruction and these, hopefully, will assist students to achieve as optimally as possible in reading.

Contrasting Three Methods in the Teaching off Reading

Programmed reading, personalized reading, and basal textbook approaches represent diverse procedures in the teaching of reading. Each has its strong/weak points. Programmed reading is basically teacher proof. Each program is written with the objectives, learning opportunities, and assessment procedures selected by the programmer as a self contained unit. There is no room here for teachers to be creative in integrating self selected ideas for reading instruction, other than to monitor what students are doing as they work through different sequential programs. The student follows the teacher proof materials of reading,

responding to a multiple choice test item, checking his/her answer with that provided by the programmer, and then using the feedback from the answer provided by the programmer to pursue the next ordered programmed item. The focal point in programmed learning is the quality of each program and how the learner interacts with these absolutes in improving his/her reading.

Personalized reading is child centered in that the learner does the selecting of sequential library books to read. The teacher intervenes only if a student is not able to make choices in reading sequential library books. In these situations, the teacher may choose a book for the student to read based on learner interests. After completing the reading of a library book, the student has a conference with his/her teacher pertaining to evaluating comprehension of content read as well as proficiency in word recognition skills. The student is heavily involved in discussing the library book contents as well as choosing the selection to read aloud to the teacher to indicate strengths/weaknesses in word identification. The focal point is the student in a quality personalized reading program.

Basal reading approaches can be successful to the degree that the teacher uses content in each story and the teaching suggestions from the manual to assist students individually to achieve optimally in reading. The teacher then has center stage to be creative in teaching and learning situations. Basal readers are neither good nor bad but depend upon the quality of reading instruction to assist each student to do well in achieving optimally in reading (Ediger, 1997, 176 -181).

More is expected of teachers and students to up the latter's test scores in reading (See Allen, 2001). Each program of reading instruction needs to be selected carefully. Then too, there are teachers who develop their very own materials and philosophy of teaching reading. Sequence is a very important item to consider in any method used in the teaching of reading.

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